United Nations

Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Secretary-General decides to send Under-Secretary-General Marrack Goulding to Bosnia-Herzegovina to examine feasibility of United Nations operation in that region.

+ Secretary-General returns to New York following talks in Paris with French Minister of Health and Humanitarian Action on humanitarian situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Somalia, among other things.

+ United Nations welcomes joint communiqué by Bangladesh and Myanmar reaffirming principles of safe and voluntary return of refugees.

+ Under-Secretary-General for Peace-keeping Operations says $2.7 billion cost of current unprecedented number of peace-keeping operations has been a significant test for United Nations.

+ United Nations Transition Authority in Cambodia continues to make progress in its effort to repatriate Cambodians wishing to return to their country.

+ Fifth and final round of negotiations on climate change convention resumes tomorrow in New York.

+ Under-Secretary-General for Human Rights calls torture "one of the greatest scourges afflicting humanity" in opening statement to eighth session of Committee against Torture.

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A United Nations spokeswoman announced today that Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali had decided to send Marrack Goulding, Under-Secretary-General for Peace-keeping operations, to Bosnia-Herzegovina to examine the evolving situation in that region and to look into the feasibility of a United Nations peace-keeping operation there.

Mr. Goulding will be travelling to Yugoslavia as soon as possible, she said.

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The Secretary-General returned to New York this morning from Paris where he met with the French Minister of Health and Humanitarian Action, Bernard Kouchner, for discussions on humanitarian action in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Somalia, as well as the coordination of humanitarian action within the United Nations.

The Secretary-General would be in contact with members of the Security Council on a number of issues before the Council, a United Nations spokeswoman said.

Acting Security Council President, Stanislaus Chigwedere (Zimbabwe) told correspondents last night, following consultations by the Council on the Secretary-General's progress report on the United Nations Protection Force in Yugoslavia (UNPROFOR), that the Council would remain in "full consultations with the Secretary-General" to ensure that "obstacles and hurdles that lie in the way" would be minimized. He said Council members would not proceed on the Bosnia-Herzegovina question until it had discussed the situation with the Secretary-General during consultations today.

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The United Nations has welcomed a joint communiqué by the Foreign Ministers of Myanmar and Bangladesh reaffirming the principles of safe and voluntary return of refugees, according to a statement by United Nations spokeswoman today.

The Coordinator of Emergency Relief, Under-Secretary-General Jan Eliasson, had been in contact with Mrs. Sadako Ogata, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), concerning the communiqué, which was issued in Dhaka yesterday.

The statement further said that while the United Nations recognized the fact that the refugee flow to Bangladesh is still continuing, the Organization had urged both sides to acknowledge the technical and confidence-building role which the UNHCR can play at various stages of the repatriation. The Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar had been informed that the UNHCR was willing to engage in consultations with both sides to help ensure a genuinely voluntary and safe repatriation of refugees.

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Under-Secretary-General for Peace-keeping Operations, Marrack Goulding, said yesterday that the lengthy and complex process of funding peace-keeping operations was an obstacle faced by the Secretariat in their effective deployment. Addressing a meeting of the Special Committee on Peace-keeping Operations, Mr. Goulding went on to say that the $2.7 billion cost of the current unprecedented number of peace-keeping operations was two and a half times the budget of the entire Organization. Such an expansion of operations had been a significant test for the Secretariat and the supporting member

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States. Providing major transport, necessary equipment, military and police personnel, as well as support personnel from the Secretariat, he said, had been the major areas of concern in setting up each operation.

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The United Nations Transition Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) continues to make progress in its effort to repatriate Cambodians wishing to return to their country.

A spokesman for UNTAC said today that, as of yesterday, 4,215 people had been returned. Tomorrow, trains would be utilized in the repatriation effort for the first time. This development was significant, the spokesman said, since it would mark the opening in Phnom Penh of the third reception centre in Cambodia of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and since this means of transportation would assume greater importance during the rainy season when road conditions deteriorate and thereby further complicate the task undertaken by the convoys of trucks.

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Negotiations on the Climate Control Convention to combat global warming will resume tomorrow, 30 April, in New York, as the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee begins its fifth and final session.

The session was suspended on 28 February after two weeks of negotiations failed to result in consensus on key aspects of the convention, which negotiators hope will be signed at the upcoming United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June. The resumed session will continue until 8 May.

At a press briefing today at Headquarters, the Committee's Executive Secretary Micheal Zammitt Cutajar said the major issue before the negotiators was to get the commitment from industrialized countries to stabilize or reduce their carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions, the leading cause of global warming. One proposal before the Committee calls for a timetable for keeping those emissions at around 1990 levels by the year 2000. According to Mr. Cutajar, developing countries have insisted, at previous sessions of the Negotiating Committee, that the bulk of the costs of their accession to a climate change convention must be paid for by the industrialized countries.

When asked if it was important that United States President George Bush sign on to the Convention, the Executive Secretary Mr. Cutajar told reporters in New York that "symbolically it would be very important".

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Calling torture "one of the greatest scourges afflicting humanity", Antoine Blanca, Under-Secretary-General for Human Rights, has wished the Committee against Torture, currently meeting in Geneva, success in contributing to torture's elimination.

In his first address to a human rights treaty monitoring body since assuming his post, Mr. Blanca recalled that the number of States parties to the Convention had risen from 63 to 66 since the last session of the Committee.

During its eighth session, which began on 27 April, the Committee will consider measures taken by Uruguay, Italy and Romania to prevent and punish acts of torture. As in previous sessions, the Committee, which is charged with monitoring the implementation of the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, will also examine reports containing well-founded indications that torture is being systematically used in a State party to the Convention. In addition, the Committee will consider communications from individuals claiming to be victims of a violation of a State party of the Convention.

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